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Chairman: Mr. BUSACCA (Italy)

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AGENDA ITEM 102: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (continued)

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 102: SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUDING QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE WORLD SOCIAL SITUATION AND TO YOUTH, AGEING, DISABLED PERSONS AND THE FAMILY (continued) (A/52/3,* A/52/56, A/52/57-E/1997/4, A/52/60-E/1997/6, A/52/80-E/1997/14, A/52/183, A/52/328 and A/52/351; A/C.3/52/L.2 and L.3; E/1997/103 and E/1997/104)

1. Mr. REYES RODRIGUEZ (Cuba) said that his country placed particular importance on the development of youth, and was working to implement the Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond at the national and international levels. Cuba had also been participating in the work of the open-ended group that was helping to prepare for the International Year of Older Persons, and his delegation recommended that additional resources should be provided to ensure that the group received multilingual conference services.

2 Policies had been implemented in Cuba to provide older persons with opportunities to participate actively in society and to ensure the availability of whatever assistance they might need. Assistance was also being provided to organizations of the disabled; the majority of the disabled had access to special education, and many had also found employment.

3. Mrs. EDWARDS (Marshall Islands) said that her Government had participated actively in the World Summit for Social Development and attached great importance to the protection of human rights, which it considered imperative for social development. As a matrilineal society, the Marshall Island strongly supported gender equality. Her Government was continuing its efforts to implement the recommendations of the World Summit, the International Conference on Population and Development, and the Fourth World Conference on Women, but appealed to the international community and non-governmental organizations for financial assistance in that regard, as it lacked the resources to provide fully for the country's development needs. Urban migration, a growing population and rising levels of education presented challenges to the Government's efforts to meet the needs of the country's youth. Her country would therefore continue to seek external assistance for its social development programmes.

4. Ms. APONTE DE ZACKLIN (Venezuela) said that her delegation supported the views expressed by the representative of Paraguay on behalf of the Rio Group.

5. Venezuela's commitment to attaining the goals of the World Summit for Social Development was reflected in the high priority it assigned to economic and social development. Programmes designed to assist youth in such areas as job creation and training, drug-abuse prevention, and social participation had achieved successful results. Moreover, deliberations on a Youth Act to codify and protect the rights of that sector of society were expected to take place at the upcoming session of the National Congress. Policies in favour of the family and children had also been instituted as an important component of Venezuela's social development strategy.

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* To be issued.

6. Ms. ARYSTANBEKOVA (Kazakhstan) underscored the need to carry out integrated policies and programmes at the national level to deal with the problems affecting youth, older people, disabled persons and the family. Kazakhstan's political and economic reforms had had an impact on the entire population, particularly socially vulnerable groups. With the transition to a free-market economy, it had been necessary to reorient the country's social protection policy in order to provide support to those living below the subsistence level.

7. The Government had adopted a number of laws and regulations setting forth specific ways to deal with the most pressing social problems. A decision had been taken on allowances for families with children; and the State-financed system for providing housing to socially vulnerable groups had been maintained. Those steps were in accordance with the goals of the International Year of the Family.

8. Kazakhstan's youth policy was designed to integrate young people fully into society and provide them with social support and assistance. It was necessary to ensure access to specialized training and education during the transition period, set up special programmes to assist young families, provide tax relief to young entrepreneurs and take specific measures to promote the employment of young people.

9. A law had been adopted to provide social protection to disabled persons, guaranteeing them access to social services and free counselling and transport. The priority objectives were to draw up a policy to establish a specific branch of production for disabled persons, create an environment in which disabled persons could live and work, set up integrated rehabilitation centres and introduce a unified approach to health care.

10. In order to achieve stable social development, Kazakhstan would further expand its national policy in that field and elaborate intersectoral action programmes with enhanced monitoring of implementation. In view of the difficulties arising during the transition period, active support from international funds and financial institutions and United Nations programmes in tackling those problems would considerably facilitate efforts to achieve the stated goals.

11. Mr. DONOKUSUMO (Indonesia) said that, although his country had worked for and achieved significant improvements in social welfare, its goals for social progress were far from realized. As in all countries, social development was inextricably linked to the economic health of the nation and the state of international economic relations.

12. In the pursuit of social development, it was important to be aware of and responsive to the social groups most at risk. His delegation would therefore work to achieve the objectives of the International Year of Older Persons. He welcomed the report of the Secretary-General on the operational framework for the International Year (A/52/328), paragraph 43 of which stressed that the promotion of active ageing in developing countries needed technical and financial international support. Both active ageing and care-giving strategies should be accorded particular consideration in research, policies and programmes in order to achieve the broad objectives of the Year. The link between overall

national development and the ageing of the population must also be considered. As part of the International Year, Indonesia had celebrated a National Day for Elderly People with the aim of increasing awareness, improving the quality of elderly people's welfare, and mobilizing society to solve related problems.

13. With regard to persons with disabilities, his delegation fully supported the Standard Rules and agreed that more must be done to make them more widely known. Awareness must be translated into effective policies and programmes which, in developing countries, could be undertaken only with the support of the international community. Programmes and measures relating to persons with disabilities should be fully integrated into overall national development activities and the technical cooperation of development and financial institutions, respectively.

14. Indonesia remained strongly committed to the ten priority areas identified for action by the World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond. The objectives of the national youth development strategy covered a range of issues intended to promote improved well-being amongst young people. The current five-year development plan addressed the concerns of young people by promoting wider access to education, increasing their participation in development and expanding the number of youth organizations.

15. Several years of rapid globalization had only exacerbated the imbalances in international economic relations, and deprivation in developing countries remained a formidable challenge, having considerable impact on the social groups currently under consideration. Developing countries would therefore continue to look to the United Nations for support in achieving their goals and aspirations, mobilizing international assistance and promoting economic growth and development.

16. Ms. WAHBI (Sudan) said that in view of the importance of young people in the development process a comprehensive national strategy had been developed to guarantee their rights. Young people were encouraged to participate in social and military activities that would give them valuable experience. Job opportunities for young people had been increased, and efforts were made to provide funding for projects initiated by youth.

17. In recent years her Government had greatly increased educational opportunities for every member of society. Special attention had been paid to the eradication of adult illiteracy in rural areas and the expansion of primary and higher education.

18. Traditional social systems in many countries were undergoing changes that particularly affected older persons. In the Sudan, however, older persons enjoyed a privileged position. Her Government sought to utilize their experience in the development process, and the importance of their participation in production and development was stressed.

19. The Sudan was making every effort to fully integrate persons with disabilities into society and was establishing training facilities to enable them to become independent. Campaigns were also undertaken to raise awareness of the problems they faced and the Standard Rules had been widely circulated.

The Government referred to those Rules when framing policies, and a national plan of action was currently being developed. Sudanese non-governmental organizations played an important role in the education of persons with disabilities, a fact that had been recognized in the nomination of the Sakina Institute for the Maurice Pate Award.

20. Every international conference had made family-related recommendations, agreeing that the family was the basic unit of society, that its welfare was important to sustainable development, and that development strategies should take the rights of the family into consideration. It must be protected and fully integrated into all sustainable development activities. The fact that greater importance was attached to the role of the individual than that of the family in many modern societies was directly responsible for a number of current social ills. The family remained the nucleus of society in the Sudan, and the Government attached particular importance to laws governing its rights. It had introduced a project to enable families to gain control over the means of production, thereby ensuring their economic stability. The needs of vulnerable families were addressed, and special provisions had been made for those affected by the unrest in the south of the country.

21. It was internationally acknowledged that social development could not be separated from economic development or from peace and stability. Globalization was the reality, and a comprehensive approach was needed to address challenges. Nevertheless, particularities must be respected, since social development could not be achieved through the imposition of one system on all societies. Local institutions should be strengthened to make them more effective.

22. With a view to promoting sustainable development, her Government had signed a peace agreement with all but one of the warring factions in southern Sudan, and was making every effort to bring that last faction into the peace process.

23. Mrs. GITTENS-JOSEPH (Trinidad and Tobago), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), said that at a conference held in July 1997 the Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community had placed high priority on skills development and the promotion of entrepreneurship among the region's young people. Many member States intended to participate in a meaningful and productive way in observing the International Year of Older Persons. There were ongoing projects in the Caribbean region to take due account of the needs of older persons. Reform programmes in the health sector and social security were designed to improve the situation of the aged. Governments and civil society provided them with social services, counselling and recreational activities.

24. Many CARICOM member States had national policies for persons with disabilities. Some countries had established agencies to coordinate the activities of organizations for the disabled, constructed fully equipped training and vocational centres, disseminated relevant information and introduced financial assistance measures, such as disability assistance grants. Although work had begun to address the needs of disabled children, much more still needed to be done in that area.

25. In order to tackle the problems affecting families, some CARICOM member States had enacted legislation to deal with domestic violence, established family courts and provided counselling and support programmes to assist families in need. The Community regional plan of action in that field included consideration of the impact of gender socialization practices, which was important in promoting equal partnership between women and men in family life.

26. Mr. CHAULAGAIN (Nepal) said that the problems of poverty and unemployment in the least developed countries required special attention and additional support measures simply to maintain the status quo. At the World Summit for Social Development Nepal, together with other developing countries, had agreed to strengthen democracy, maintain the rule of law, protect human rights and implement a liberal economic policy. Its efforts in that direction had not been enough to improve the situation. The active engagement of the United Nations system in carrying out the mandates of the World Summit for Social Development was indispensable, and his delegation looked forward to the establishment at the current session of the preparatory committee of the whole called for in paragraph 46 (b) of General Assembly resolution 51/202.

27. Nepal attached great importance to the implementation of United Nations programmes for youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and the family, and intended to participate actively in the work of the Commission for Social Development in those areas.

28. Mrs. CASTRO de BARISH (Costa Rica) said that her delegation associated itself with the statement made the previous day by the representative of Paraguay on behalf of the Rio Group. She noted with appreciation the report on the operational framework for the International Year of Older Persons (A/52/328) and supported the key dates and selected activities set forth in the highlights of preparations for 1999. Due emphasis had been given to the very important role to be played by the Commission for Social Development. In that connection, the Commission's consideration of the theme "Social services for all" should also focus on changes affecting social security systems for vulnerable groups of older persons, such as those over the age of 80, those living in extreme poverty and the disabled. Special attention should also be given to the situation of women, young people, young workers, family welfare, new relationships in civil society, the free-market system and the role of the State.

29. Costa Rica's social policies had always sought to protect and promote the rights of children, young people, older persons and the disabled. The policy of free education for all had been established in 1865. The individual human being had always been at the centre of her country's social policy. In its preparations for the International Year, the Commission was being assisted by an ad hoc informal open-ended support group. In that regard, her delegation supported the proposal put forward by the representative of Cuba to provide the support group with the necessary assistance to enable it to carry out its important work.

30. Mr. AL-HARIRI (Syrian Arab Republic) said that social development, covering as it did a number of important issues, remained a priority of the international community. There was an enormous difference between people's aspirations and the reality of their lives, despite the availability of a wealth of natural

resources. There was no alternative to international cooperation between developing and developed countries, based on mutual respect and joint interests. Developed countries had a responsibility to halt social and economic decline and address current imbalances.

31. Despite the heavy cost in human and material resources that his country was forced to bear in defending itself against Israel's policies of occupation and settlement expansion, a comprehensive social development programme had been undertaken in every sphere. Education was free at all levels and compulsory at the primary level, health care was provided free to all sectors of the population without exception, special attention being paid to vulnerable groups, and young people played an important part in the development and execution of development plans. The importance of the family to society was recognized in the Syrian Constitution.

32. The rise in the standard of living of most citizens reflected the success of his country's development plans. The provision of health, education and social services had been greatly extended, there had been a significant decrease in infant mortality, and standards of health, nutrition and education had been raised. State policy was directed towards the creation of a favourable environment for social development, social integration and increased employment opportunities.

33. The Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan represented a serious obstacle to the social development process, since it had forced more than half a million Syrian citizens to leave their land and homes, making it difficult to achieve the hoped-for level of progress. Israel perpetrated flagrant violations of human rights in the Golan, exacerbating the negative effects of its occupation on social and economic development plans and programmes.

34. A world free of foreign colonization and occupation, in which relations between States were based on mutual understanding and equality, would be more peaceful, secure and stable.

35. Mr. LEVY (Israel) said that his country had taken steps to support those who were physically or mentally challenged and required assistance to lead lives in which their potential could be fully realized. Over the past five decades, Israel had been confronted with the need to integrate into society those who had been seriously wounded and disabled in war and indiscriminate terrorist attacks and it had developed a keen sensitivity to the needs of disabled persons. His Government was considering a draft law on equal rights for people with disabilities. The Public Commission, made up of government representatives, academic experts and representatives of organizations for the disabled, had recommended the adoption of comprehensive and detailed legislation defining the rights of the disabled in Israel. The Commission believed that only such legislation could narrow the gap between the reality of the lives of disabled persons and the ideals of equality and the human dignity. In the course of its work, the Commission had concluded that both the prohibition of discrimination against people with disabilities and appropriate measures to meet their special needs were essential to ensure genuine equality. On the basis of that dual approach, it had approved the guiding principles of the draft law.

The meeting rose at 4.30 p.m.